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A Study of The Factors Affecting Attendance at Adult Education Short Courses

by

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ABSTRACT

The present study aimed at understanding the relationship between students' attendance at adult education courses and their self-esteem, expectations, and classroom environment. The subjects were 540 adult learners taking short courses at seven adult education centres. The courses taken included shorthand, typewriting, bookkeeping, and import and export practice. Results revealed no significant relationship between self-esteem and attendance rate. However, classroom environment and student expectation were associated with attendance rate. Furthermore, self-esteem, student expectation, and classroom environment were moderately related with each other. When students' demographic variables were taken into consideration, student expectation and classroom environment were still powerful predictors of students' attendance. Noteworthily, none of the demographic variables were significantly related to attendance rate directly. It was found that some personal and social factors such as conflicts of interests, family commitments, change of jobs also affected student attendance rate. Lastly, implications of findings for the future adult education policy were discussed.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the general background of the proposed study will be discussed. The research question will then be proposed. Lastly, the significance of the study will be highlighted.

A. Background

Education is an important means to change the present society. It is also of decisive importance to the social and economic welfare of the individual, in so far as work satisfaction, and improvement of working environment are concerned. Education also plays an important role in the promotion of democracy. It can enhance the individual's interest in social issues and increase his opportunities for participating in cultural life.

It is apparent that adult literacy has immediate social and economic implications for the individual person and a society as a whole. A person with literacy skills is able to participate in the social, cultural and political life of his or her country in a

way that is denied the illiterate person. Similarly, the potential to improve his or her economic status by accessing information about improved work practices is also apparent. The ability to read and write enables people to understand their environment and the environment of others. Such understanding is critical to their ability to survive in harmony with the human and natural environment, and also to contribute in a positive way to the development of an increasingly complex world. It is therefore, clearly in the interests of governments to give high priority to the development of programmes for improving the overall literacy level of their adult population.

Everybody learns from the experiences of everyday living. Adult education offers opportunity for the learners to reach beyond their experiences and to grow and develop. Adult education is a commodity too valuable to be priced at the market rate and restricted to the more wealthy as a scarce resource.

We live in a period of rapid technological change. It is no longer possible even in principle for the initial period of full-time education to be an adequate preparation for life. We need to develop mechanisms which facilitate life-long education. An educated work-force is needed if technological change in the

work place is to be beneficial; an educated population is needed if we are to make wise communal decisions about the pace and the direction of technological change. Thus, there is a clear need to move toward a situation in which adult education is seen as being as universal and natural as schooling for children.

"Vocational education" includes all those educational activities which are designed to prepare an individual for entry to a particular occupation, improve his or her knowledge or skill in relation to the exercise of an occupation, permit or promote the opportunity to change occupations; these activities may be conducted within educational institutions, skill training centers, or individual enterprises.

In practice, adult education functions differently according to the needs of different countries. In developing countries, adult education is for economic development and social emancipation; while in developed countries it is for professional advancement and self-actualization (Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982).

Adult studies differ from those taken in formal schooling. Courses were primarily noncredit in nature, and the subject matter proved to be overwhelmingly nonacademic. Thirty-three percent of adult learning activities were vocational, while 20 percent were in the area of "recreational" learning (Axford, 1969).

Emphasis in adult learning is on the practical rather than on the academic -- that is, interest is in the applied aspect of learning rather than in the theoretical. Skills are emphasized more than knowledge or information for its own sake. Subject matter related to the performance of everyday tasks and current obligations accounted for the largest block of total activities studied. It was significant that the vocational and home and family life categories alone represented 47 percent of the subjects persons studied on their own and 44 percent of all the formal courses attended by adults (Axford, 1969).

Governments considering options available for improving the literacy level of the adult population have the alternatives of looking to either the formal or non-formal education systems. Throughout the world, governments have almost invariably looked mainly to the non-formal system, namely adult education, to solve the problem of adult illiteracy, rather than to the formal system. In economic terms, non-formal education is invariably less expensive than formal education. However, there are also advantages in a social context for using the non-formal system for literacy work. Non-formal education meets people at their point of need within the community settings in which they live

and work. Programmes to improve literacy offered by the non-formal education system is therefore economically and socially preferred option.

This provision of an educational ladder, or second opportunity, is of tremendous benefit to those who may not have fully profited from secondary education, or who, following some years of absence from education or the workforce, wish to upgrade or re-enter the world of work. Such programmes have been particularly appreciated by mature women seeking to change their lifestyle.

Hong Kong serves as a bridge between the developing and the industrialized world. She is concurrently a developing country and one of the foremost industrial, commercial and financial centers of the world. As a developing country she faces the problem presented by the very recent advent of free universal education and consequent lack of the required professional and technical skills.

Hong Kong is a highly urbanized and industrialized city with a population of 5.7 million people. Census statistics of 1991 showed that 3.6 million people in the work force had only high school education or less. Most of them were non-skill or semi-skill workers in business and industry. Their jobs range from manual, para-technical, clerical and junior secretarial in

factories and business corporations. Most of these workers did not receive formal training nor did they possess basic skills (Census and Statistics Department Hong Kong, 1991). Adult and continuing education becomes an important means of in-service training for them.

Houle and Knowles (Houle, 1961; Knowles, 1979) introduced four models of agencies to discern the concept of Adult Education institutions. Type I Agencies are established to serve the educational needs of adults. Adult Education here is a central function. Under this category, there are proprietary schools, independent residential and non-residential centres, and adult centres. Type II Agencies are established to serve the educational needs of youth, assuming the added responsibility of at least partially serving the educational needs of adults. Adult education here is a secondary function. Included in this category are the public schools, junior colleges, colleges and universities. Type III Agencies are established to serve both educational and non-educational needs of the community. Adult education here is an allied function, employed to fulfill only some of the needs which agencies recognize as their responsibility. Included in this category are libraries, museums, health and welfare agencies. Type IV Agencies are established to serve the special

interests of special groups. Adult education here has a subordinate function employed primarily to further the special interests of the agency itself. Included in this category are business and industry, labour unions, governments, churches and voluntary organizations.

In Hong Kong, there are four major categories of providing agency. First, there is the government, especially the Adult Education Section of Education Department but also other departments such as Labour and Health Departments. The second type is the statutory authorities established by law with reference to an educational purpose. This would include the two extramural studies departments of the Universities, the two Continuing Education Centres of the Polytechnics, Hong Kong Productivity Centre, etc. Third, there are the profit-making private organizations providing either face-to-face tuition or other kinds of educational services. The fourth category are those private non-profit making and voluntary organizations in which adult education is the main function or an implicit or an expressed function supporting social, economic, religious purpose.

Adult Education Service, under the management of Caritas Hong Kong - the Catholic Welfare Bureau, is the largest provider of adult vocational programs. Unlike other voluntary agencies in Hong Kong which do not have their primary concern in vocational training for working adults, Caritas Adult Education Service has operated 26 adult education centres in different localities to meet the educational needs of adults.

Since its establishment in 1963, Caritas Adult Education Service has a steady growth of student body up to 100,000 in 1990. However, student enrollment is one thing, but attendance of student is another. Being deeply committed to its mission of helping adults, Caritas Adult Education Service is more concerned with the situation than other agencies to pursue their vocational advancement.

Adult education in Hong Kong is a complex assortment of providers; more than 150,000 students attend part-time courses operated by the major providers such as the two universities, the polytechnic, the Adult Education Department, the British Council, Caritas and the Baptist College. A substantial proportion of what was offered was vocationally oriented courses (Dalglish, 1984).

The Hong Kong Polytechnic holds the view that, in a developing community such as Hong Kong, where resources are limited, it is necessary to concentrate its efforts on vocationally-oriented programmes. Therefore the majority of programmes are 'hard-core' and designed to meet the vocational requirements of commerce, industry and the public sector. In this way, courses are geared to manpower requirements, job opportunities and professional standards (Hong Kong Polytechnic, 1981).

Hong Kong is dependent for all her needs on the outside world and in order to survive she has to maintain her international trade. Newly developing countries like the Philippines and Korea are competing against Hong Kong over large areas of her manufacturing business because they have access to cheaper labour. This means that Hong Kong must move on if she is to continue to keep up with the expectations of her people. It is therefore necessary that the education and training facilities respond immediately to the changing needs of industry and commerce. Part-time education is able to operate much more flexibly than full-time education. It is also economically viable, and can cater to the needs of large numbers of people. It is not realistic to depend on the school system; high technology will not wait for these young people to grow up. The highly skilled people are needed now.

The awareness of the educational needs of the working population of Hong Kong is present in some quarters. The existing system has to be enlarged and broadened. It needs to move away from the model of student demand and look at ways in which it can offer a service which will support the community through a period of dramatic change. The expectations of the people of Hong Kong are increasing: they have worked hard and it would be tragic if our future were to suffer because of our inability to adjust to the changing needs of our customers. Adult education in Hong Kong therefore has a vital role to play in ensuring that hope of prosperity becomes a reality.

There is no community college in Hong Kong and the two polytechnics only aim at providing credential programs of postsecondary level. Hence, vocational training for the non-skill and semi-skill workers are left unattended.

This study intends to describe the factors affecting the attendance rate of vocational courses in adult education centres, and the persistence in educational activities of these students.

B. Research Question

Literature on educational research has shown that motivation of adult learners is largely influenced by the psychological and social factors both of which compel or impede participation (Cross, 1981; Darkenwald & Valentine, 1985). In order to enhance participation, one must attempt to understand how these factors impact learners' decision to participate and formulate strategies to increase motivation.

The framework of analysis of the problem will be based on adult education literature on participation and educational psychology literature. Since the writer is attempting to investigate persistence in participation behavior through motivation theories of needs and drives, individual beliefs and attitude, psychology literature will be used.

The research question proposed to be studied is as follows:

What are the factors affecting the persistence in class attendance among students of adult education short courses?

It is the intention of this study to substantiate whether or not the adult learner's attendance rate is related to self-esteem, expectation, or classroom environment with teacher and with other students.

C. Significance Of The Study

Different researches show that people attend adult education for different reasons and purposes. Some take courses for survival sake, while others aim at self-fulfillment. As pointed out by Boshier (1973), the motivation for learning is a function of the interaction between internal psychological factors and external environmental variables. The present study attempts to examine how a number of internal (e.g., self-esteem, student expectation) and external (e.g., classroom environment) factors are related to students' attendance in adult education courses.

In Hong Kong, adult education has a low priority of importance in government education policy. Relatively little money is spent on the provision of courses for adult learners. With such a small share of the education funding, it is paramount that the money should be spent efficiently and effectively. Thus, the maintenance of students' interest and motivation in the courses they are taking is one of the key concern for course planners and organizers. The present research will provide background information as regards the important factors that are directly or indirectly related to students' high attendance rate. With better understanding of the motives and purposes of the adult

learners, educators are more well informed and will be able to tailor the courses according to students' needs.

Retaining adults in educational programs is a major challenge for adult educators. The results of the present study attempts to shed light on this issue, and are valuable to adult educators in Hong Kong as well as in other countries.

Caritas is a well established voluntary agency in providing various social and educational services. In the area of adult education, it is considered a pioneer and the major non-profit making institution which provides a wide range of different language, commercial, vocational, art and cultural courses. As a large portion of the subjects will come from Caritas, the present study will also help this institution in its future planning for adult courses, especially in the vocational sector.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter first reviews the concept of adult motivation for learning. Then it looks at factors affecting participation Lastly, the factors of retention for adult learners will be examined. Based on this literature, a conception for the present study will be presented.

A. Theories Of Motivation For Adult Learning

Adults are not only volunteers in the learning process, but the subjects they learn are, by and large, voluntarily chosen. This freedom of choice in regard to what is learned is a characteristic of adult education that sets it apart from the education of children and young people. There are, in fact no limits to the curriculum of adult education. In the early 1960s, Houle (1961) formulated a topology that identified three "types" of adult learner.

The first type in his study, goal-oriented learners, used learning to gain specific objectives, such as learning to speak before an audience, learning to deal

ness practices, and similar concrete objectives. For the goal oriented, said Houle, learning was a series of episodes, each beginning with the identification of a need or an interest. Such learners did not restrict their learning activities to any one institution or method but select whatever method would best achieve their purpose -- taking a course, joining a group, reading a book, taking a trip. The second type, activity-oriented learners, participated primarily for the sake of the activity itself rather than to develop a skill or learn subject matter. They might take a course or join a group to escape loneliness or boredom or an unhappy home or job situation, to find a husband or a wife, to amass credits or degrees, or to uphold family tradition. Most of the activity-oriented learners in Houle's sample said that they did almost no reading. Houle suggested, however, that if the sample had been larger, it might have included activity-oriented people who used reading for purposes other than to learn the content. The third type identified by Houle consisted of those who were learning oriented; that is, those who pursued learning for its own sake. They seemed to possess a fundamental desire to know and to grow through learning, and their activities were continuums and lifelong. Most were avid readers; they joined groups, and even chose jobs, for the learning

potential offered; they watched serious programs on television and made extensive background preparations when traveling in order to appreciate what they saw.

Cognitive theories assumed that motivation was a function of the interaction between internal psychological factors and external environment variables. More specifically, motivational behaviour in learning was determined by the individual's perception and interpretation of environment factors. Different motivation models would be examined to provide an understanding of motivation behaviour.

Atkinson and Feather (1966) provided a theory of achievement motivation which pointed out the importance of expectancy in determining people's motivation. It was further shown that one's expectancy was not only affected by the ongoing feedback in the current situation but also by one's past experience. For example, an individual who perceives his/her effort frequently results in success has higher self-esteem than one who experiences frequent failures (Howard, 1989).

The work of Kjell Rubenson (1977), was a modification and application of earlier work by Vroom (1964), in which Vroom attempted to explain the motivation and incentives of people for work. The expectancy-valance

model started with psychological theories of motivation. The "expectancy" part of Rubenson's formula consisted of two components: the expectation of one's chance of success in the activity and the perceived positive consequence (or value) of being successful. These two components were multiplicative. If either assumed a value of zero, the resultant force was zero, and there was no motivation to participate. The other part of the formula, valence, was concerned with affect and could be positive, indifferent, or negative. Its strength depended on the anticipated consequences of participation. The valence was the algebraic sum of the values that the individual put on the different consequences of participation. The major attention was given to how an individual learner perceived his environment and what he expected to gain from participation in adult education.

Another theory of motivation was based on anticipated benefits such as pleasure, self-esteem and reaction from others (Tough, 1979). Allen Tough, a leading proponent of research on self-directed learning, did not have a well-developed theory about why people undertake self-directed learning but his paper (1979) was clearly moving towards explanation and toward the conceptual organization of data. In an interesting experiment, Tough and his colleagues

(Tough, Abbey, and Orton, 1979) asked learners to assign weights to their reasons for learning, observing that this was a task and people could do fairly easily. Their assignment of the task and people's acceptance of it made a basic assumption about learners that was not made by all psychologists, namely, that behaviour was understood and could be articulated by the subjects of the research. This assumption, of course, underlined most of Tough's research on self-directed learning, showing a faith in adults not only to direct their own learning but also to understand why they wished to do so. Tough and his colleagues made no claim that the total picture of learning motivation could be explained by the participants, but they built their model on the belief that the anticipated benefits to be derived from learning were "present in the person's conscious mind" and constituted a "significant portion of the person's total motivation for learning." Indeed, they claimed that the learner's conscious anticipation of reward was more important than subconscious forces or environmental forces. Their initial data suggested that their direct approach to constructing a theory of motivation based on anticipated benefits was feasible and might provide one piece of the puzzle of a theory of participation in learning activities.

This model consisted of five stages at which benefits might be anticipated, moving generally through (1) engaging in a learning activity, to (2) retaining the knowledge or skill, to (3) applying the knowledge, to (4) gaining a material reward, as in promotion, and (5) gaining a symbolic regard, as in credits and degrees. At each stage, anticipated benefits might be classified into three clusters of personal feelings: pleasure (happiness, satisfaction, enjoyment, feeling good), self-esteem (regarding self more highly, feeling more confident, maintaining self-images), and a category labeled others" (others regard individual more highly, praise him, like him, feel grateful). Adult educators had long observed that adults were more motivated to learn when involved in setting their own learning goals, when given opportunities for relevant practice, when the "payoff" of learning was immediate.

Force-field analysis incorporated basic sociological research in identifying positive and negative forces in the environment (Miller, 1967). In any study there were positive forces and negative forces. When positive forces overcame the negative forces, then one would have the drive to learn.

Harry Miller's (1967) social class theory was built on the needs hierarchy of Maslow (1954) and the force-field analysis of Lewin (1947). This theory explained not only why people participated but also why there were large differences between social classes in what they hoped to attain from participation. Maslow maintained that people could not be concerned about higher human needs -- for recognition (status), achievement, and self-realization -- until the lower fundamental needs -- for survival, safety, and belonging -- had been met. Applied to adult education, the needs hierarchy would predict that members of the lower social classes would be interested primarily in education that met survival needs, mostly job training and adult basic education, while the upper social classes would have fulfilled those needs and would see education as leading to achievement and self-realization. Clearly, data showing who wanted what in adult education support Miller's use of Maslow's needs hierarchy. That is, those with a high school education or less were interested primarily in job-related education, while education aimed towards self-understanding, recreation, personal development, and the like, appealed primarily to well-educated people and to others not concerned about survival in the labour market (Carp, Peterson, & Roelfs, 1974; Cross, 1979a; John-

stone & Rivera, 1965). Miller pointed out that the needs hierarchy was also useful in accommodating research showing a relationship between educational interests and age and position in the life cycle. Early stages of adulthood were concerned with satisfaction of needs low in the hierarchy -- getting established in a job and beginning a family. Older people, having satisfied those needs, were free to devote energy to achieving status, to enhancing achievement, and to working towards self-realization.

Miller's basic strategy was to use Lewin's concept of positive and negative forces, which, when combined, formed a resultant motivational force. Figure 1 illustrated Miller's analysis of the forces presented in the motivation of the lower section of the lower social class (abbreviated as lower-lower class hereafter) for education for vocational competence. The width of the arrow symbolized the strength of the force, while the position of the horizontal one indicated the resultant force -- quite low in this example, indicating little motivation for participation.

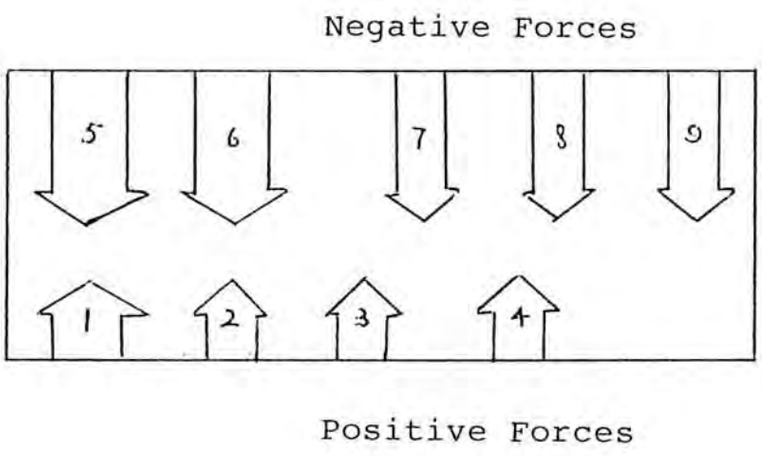

Figure 1. Education for Vocational Competence, Lower-Lower -Class Level (Miller, 1967)

Note. The various positive and negative forces are defined as:

Positive Forces

1. Survival needs
2. Changing technology
3. Safety needs of female culture
4. Governmental attempts to change opportunity structure

Negative Forces

5. Action-excitement orientation of male culture
6. Hostility to education and to middle-class object orientation
7. Relative absence of specific, immediate job opportunities at end of training
8. Limited access through organizational ties
9. Weak family structure

The social environment theory, derived from early work by Lewin (1936) on field theory and Murray (1938) on needs-press, was that behaviour was a joint product of individuals and their environment (Darkenwald & Gavin, 1987). In other words, individuals and social environments reciprocally influenced each other. The social environment of a classroom determined in large part the attitudes and behaviour of individual students in learning.

Adults with higher self-esteem, positive valence and positive force in the environment were more motivated to learn.

B. Theories Of Participation

Because of the voluntary nature of adult education, policymakers concerned with enhancing access to lifelong learning must first give careful attention to current patterns of participation.

Since the early research on adult learning, different approaches had been used to study participation. Situational, social and psychological antecedents of participation in adult education were attributable to Knox and Videbeck (1963). They viewed the educational activity of adults as one of many closely related "participatory domains" characterizing the general phenomenon of social participation. A "participatory domain" was defined as a cluster of participatory acts and social relationships related to a single life only. Such acts were considered patterned if they grouped together to form a meaningful whole and were systematically recurrent. According to their theory of patterned participation, variations in participation could be attributed to the interaction between one's subjective orientation toward participation and the objective organization of one's lifespace. The objective organization of an individual's lifespace was conceptually defined to include the following components: one's role and status configuration, the availability of partici-

patory opportunities, and the personal structures and environmental restraints influencing one's participatory alternatives. Also, the more positive one's attitude toward participation and the greater the perceived support of social and personal norms, the stronger one's inclination to participate. (Groteluescher and Caulley, 1977). In concert with this framework, Groteluescher and Caulley employed an expectancy-value function to quantify the differential contribution of dispositions toward participation in continuing education. They identified three key constructs as antecedents to participation: (1) an individual's attitude towards participation, (2) an individual's perception of the expectations of others towards his behaviour (the subjective social norm), and (3) the expectations an individual imposed upon himself (the subjective personal norm). Following the quantification approach employed by Fishbein, the authors generated the following multivariate equation as a basis for predicting both intention to participate and actual participatory behaviour:

$$B \sim I = w_1(A) + w_2(SSN) + w_3(SPN)$$

Where :

$B \sim I$ = the individual's engagement in recurrent learning (B) as a function of his/her intention to participate (I),

w_1, w_2, w_3 = the different weights assigned to the three different factors respectively,

A = one's attitude towards participation,

SSN = perceived social norms, and

SPN = perceived personal norms.

According to the formula, an individual's engagement in recurrent learning (B) was determined by his/her intention to participate (I). Behavioural intentions, in turn, were a function of the weighted sum of one's attitude towards participation (A) and the perceived social norms (SSN) and personal norms (SPN) governing such behaviour. Functionally, the more positive one's attitude towards participation and the greater the perceived support of social and personal norms, the stronger one's inclination to participate. Discrepancies between an individual's measured intention to participate and his or her actual behaviour, according to the model's advocates, would be attributable to the presence of mitigating factors or obstacles.

The "expectancy-value" paradigm of participation in adult education was developed by Rubenson (1977). It determined both the perceived value of an educational activity (valence) and the probability of being able to participate in and/or benefit from a given learning episode (expectancy). Perceived value of adult education and readiness to participate were the important variables of Psychosocial Interaction Model (Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982). To the extent, therefore, that one's total current environment required or encouraged further learning, one would perceive adult education as having, at least potentially, high personal value or utility. When learning press was less pronounced, as it generally was for persons toward the lower end of the social economics status (SES) continuum, adult education was less likely to be perceived as potentially useful or valuable. An individual's perception of the value of adult education quite obviously would affect that individual's disposition or readiness to participate.

The importance of goal congruence was also supported by Anderson and Darkenwald (1979) when they stated that the "most powerful predictor of persistence in adult education was satisfaction with the learning activity in terms of its 'helpfulness' in meeting one's objectives" (pp. 4-5). Some students might have un-

realistic expectations and set unrealistic goals. This being consistent with a false sense of self confidence with respect to academic expectations. This was supported by findings in a previous study where it was concluded that such incongruities between expectations and the reality of adult learning show promise in explaining dropout behavior (Garrison, 1985).

Social environment theory was employed to determine the relation of dropout behavior to the social ecology of the classroom. Research in school settings indicated discrepancies between students' expectations of a specific classroom environment and their actual experiences in that environment promote dissatisfaction (Darkenwald & Gavin, 1987). The social environment of a classroom determined in large part the attitudes and behavior of individual students. Degree of congruence between students' expectations and a specific classroom environment were to some extent inevitable. Such congruence would result in some degree of satisfaction. The greater the degree of congruence, and thus satisfaction, the greater the probability that students would persist.

In a learning activity, literature on educational research showed that participation was a complex phenomenon (McClosky, 1968). It was not a single act but the result of a chain of responses each of which is based on an evaluation of the position of the individual in his environment (Cross, 1981). This conception of behavior as a constantly flowing stream rather than a series of discrete events was consistent with the "radical theoretical revision" now taking place in the psychology of motivation (see Figure 2).

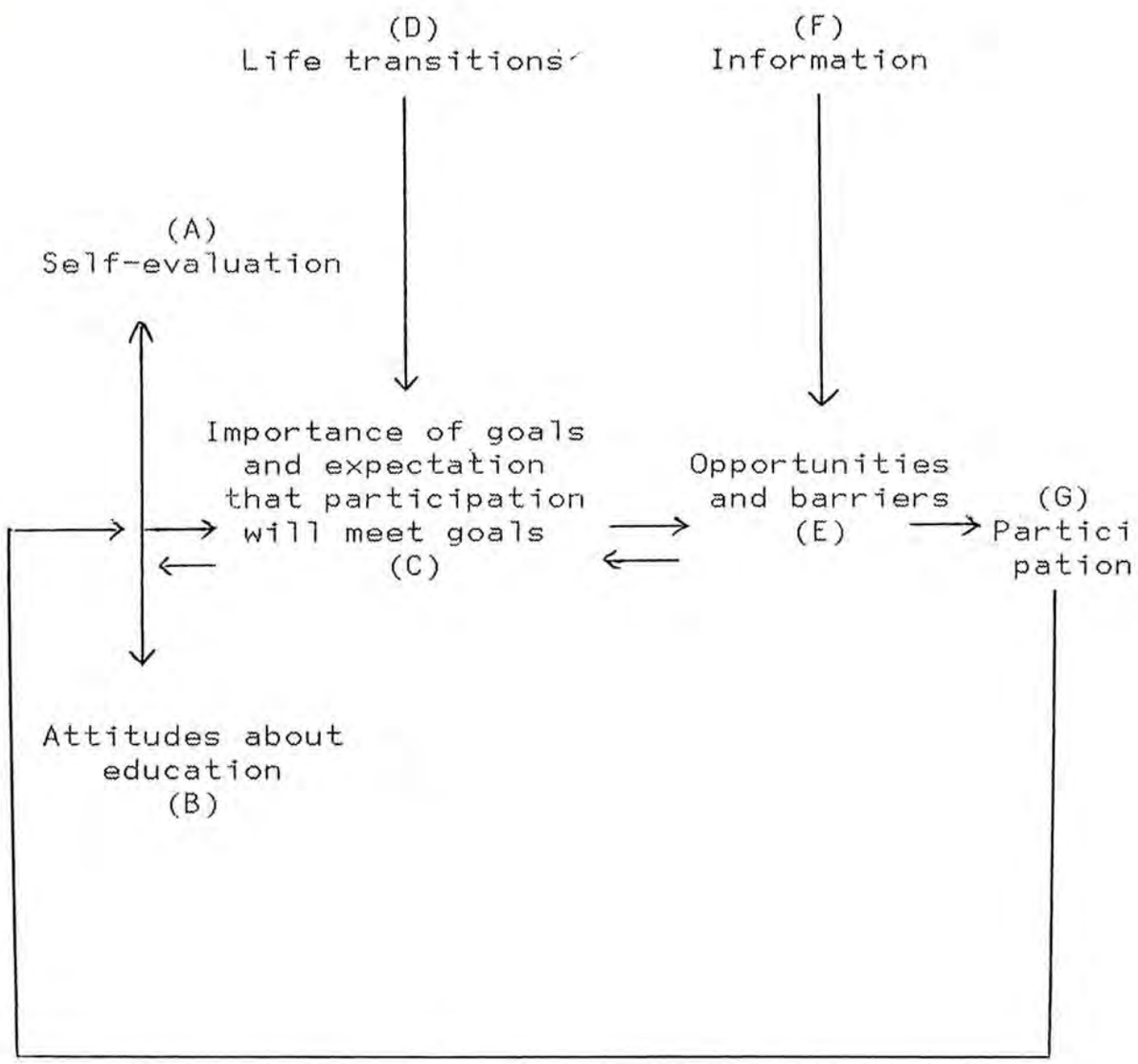

Figure 2. Chain-of-Response (COR) Model for Understanding Participation in Adult Learning Activities (Cross, 1981)

Regarding point A, self-evaluation, the stable personality characteristics played an important role in the motivation for achievement.

Attitudes toward education (B) arose directly from the learner' own past experience and indirectly from the attitudes and experiences of friends and "significant others."

Point C, the importance of goals and the expectation that goals would be met, would be recognized as the familiar expectancy-valence theory of motivation arising out of the work of Lewin (1938), Atkinson (1966), Vroom (1964), and Rubenson (1977). It had two components: "valence", the importance of the goal to the individual and "expectancy", the individual's subjective judgment that pursuit of the goal would be successful and would lead to the desired reward. Expectancy was related to self-esteem (indicated by reverse arrow), in that individuals with high self-esteem "expect" to be successful, whereas those with less self-confidence entertained doubts about their probable success.

Life transitions (D) as periods of change calling for adjustment to new phases of the life cycle were important. Related to the gradual transitions of life were sudden dramatic changes, such as divorce or loss

of a job, which might "trigger" a latent desire for education into action.

Once the individual was motivated to participate in some form of learning activity, barriers and special opportunities for adult learning (E) were thought to play an important role. If adults got to this point in the COR model with a strong desire to participate, it was likely that the force of their motivation would encourage them to seek out special opportunities and to overcome modest barriers.

Point F in the COR model, accurate information, was receiving considerable attention now in the creation of education information centers and educational brokering agencies. Its role in the model was critical in that it provided the information that linked motivated learners to appropriate opportunities.

The arrow from G to AB accommodated the well-known research finding that people who had participated in adult education were more likely to do in the future - presumably because such participation enhanced self-esteem, created positive attitudes toward education, led to increased expectation of success, overcame the barriers and obtained the opportunities in participation.

C. Theories Of Adult Student's Retention

In the following section, the principal theoretical perspectives were reviewed and critiqued.

Roger Boshier (1973) believed that motivation for learning was a function of the interaction between internal psychological factors and external environmental variables, or at least the participant's perception and interpretation of environmental factors. His theoretical conclusion was that "both adult education participation and dropout could be understood to occur as a function of the magnitude of the discrepancy between the participant's self-esteem and key aspects (largely people) of the educational environment. Nonparticipants manifest self/institution incongruence and do not enroll" (1973, P.260). Boshier seemed to suggest that a number of incongruencies (between self and ideal self, self and other students, self and teacher, self and institutional environment) were additive; the greater the sum, the greater the likelihood of nonparticipation or dropout.

Boshier's theory suggested that the proper matching of adults to educational environments was important. But he also suggested that certain people, especially those who showed a high degree of dissatisfaction with themselves (through high discrepancy

scores between self and ideal self), were likely to project their own dissatisfaction onto the external environment and to dropout of almost any kind of environment. Self-esteem of the individual was one of the very important factors in educational participation.

Using reinforcement theory, Irish (1978), specified three anticipated reinforcers: goals, expectations and benefits for reinforcing the attendance.

The expectancy-valence theory (Rubenson and Hoghielm, 1978) explained the learner's goal and expectation. The theory assumed that a person's choice of activities results from both the "value he attaches to the result of his actions and of his expectations of being able to carry out the action in question" (Borgstrom, 1980). The basic model could be depicted in Figure 3.

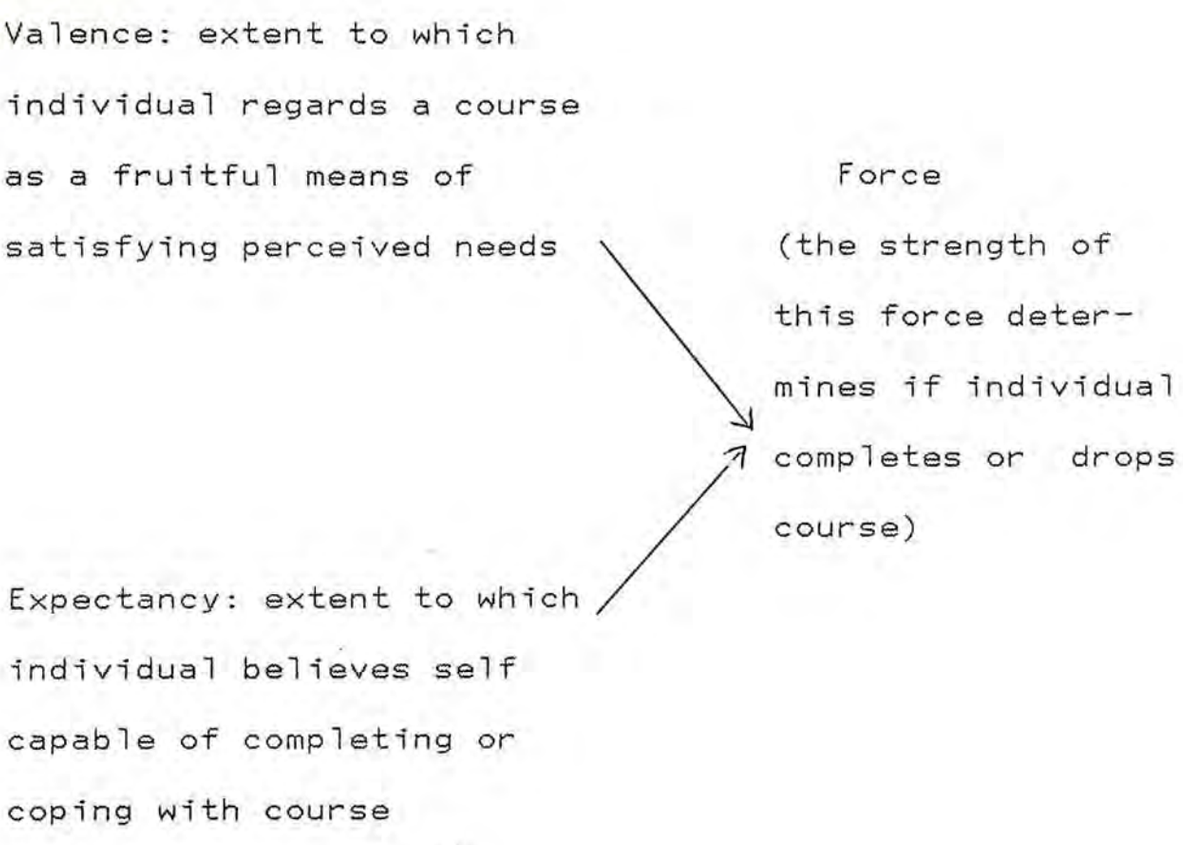

Figure 3 Expectancy-valence Model (Rubenson & Hoghielm, 1978)

Put simply, expectancy-valence theory asserted that learners will persist if they perceived a specific course or learning activity as satisfying an important need (positive valence) and if they expected to be able to complete or cope with the course or learning activity in question (positive expectancy). If expectancy

and valence were both highly positive, one would predict persistence. If both were low, or one had a value of zero, then dropout would be predicted.

Irish (1978) employed reinforcement theory and the functional analysis of behavior to develop an instrument for predicting dropout from classes in education. Three sets of reinforcers were identified: those that might take place in the classroom; those that might take place outside the classroom; and those that might take place on the job as the result of skills acquired in the class. Her findings indicated that in-class (i.e., classroom social environment) negative reinforcers were the most potent predictors of dropout.

D. Contextual Variables

The present study takes in account the contextual variables such as situational conditions arising from one's situation in life at a given time, that is, the realities of one's social and physical environment. Time, child care and transportation were the problems for geographically isolated and physically handicapped learners. Lack of time, unavailability of child care service (thus, no one to take care of one's children), transportation was among the obstacles to

education. These problems were mentioned more often by people who were in their thirties or forties (vs. younger or older ones), with higher education (vs. lower education group), and with high-income occupations (vs. people with low pay jobs) (Cross, 1981). Child care presented a significant problem to women between the ages of 18 and 39 (and to few other population subgroups), and transportation was a significant problem to the elderly and the poor but rarely to the middle class or middle aged. Institutional conditions consisted of all those practices and procedures that excluded or discouraged working adults from participating in educational activities - inconvenient schedules or duration (Cross, 1981; Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982; Darkenwald & Valentine, 1985). In the following analyses, age, sex, marital status, educational level and nature of work were treated as the personal factors. In a hierarchical regression analysis, these factors were controlled to examine the effects of contextual variables on student's attendance rate.

E. Conception Of The Study

From the reviewed literature, the conception of this proposed study can be illustrated as shown in Figure 4.

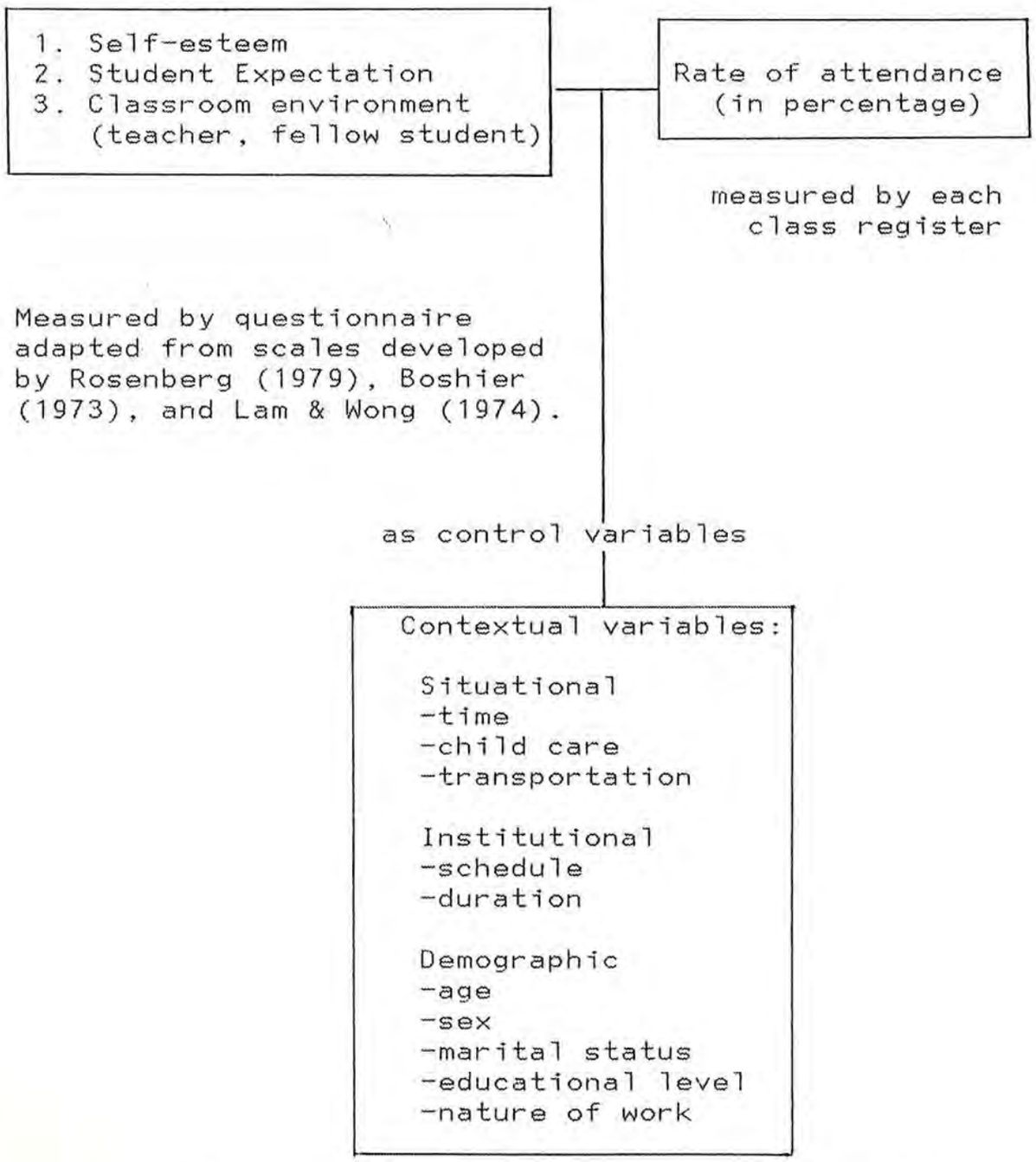

Figure 4 Conception of the study

As Boshier (1973) suggested that the adult learner's two primary concerns were "maintaining inner harmony with himself and with the environment" (p.259). If incongruities developed resulting in anxiety, then dropout was likely to occur. Boshier talked about environmental variables from a broad perspective initially and then suggested students' participation was dependent on their discrepancy in self concept and other important contextual variables. In other words, he operationalized interactions between the learner and the environment as self/other incongruities - a psychological variable. He then further reduced the model by stating that "since self-rejection is pervasive (and self/ideal were commonly regarded as measures of global self-esteem) it was suggested that self/other incongruence as arise from self/ideal incongruence."

Some students might have unrealistic expectation and be setting unrealistic goals of the program resulting in an incongruence leading to dropout (Garrison, 1985, 1987). An important motivational concern would seem to be that adult learners perceived the external environment to be relevant to their goals if they were to persist (Garrison, 1985). The importance of goal

congruence was also supported by Anderson and Darkenwald (1979). They believed that the satisfaction with and the perceived usefulness of the courses were paramount in determining one's persistence in attendance. The more anticipated benefits could achieve, the greater the probability that students would retain (Tough, 1979).

Adults were voluntary learners, they were self-directing (Tough, 1979). They were responsible for their own learning, and had acquired a reservoir of experience. Furthermore, learners should have a major role in deciding what would be learned and how it would be learned, and learning should focus on learner's needs rather than on those of others.

Beder and Darkenwald (1982) found that the study population perceived adults to be more intellectually curious, more concerned with practical applications, more motivated to learn, more willing to take responsibility for learning, clearer about what they wanted to learn, and more willing to work hard at learning. Adults were less emotionally dependent on the teacher. They would persist if the discrepancies between their own expectations and the actual teaching methods was low.

Persistence in learning and higher attendance rate required congruencies between self/ideal and self/other (Boshier, 1973). In regard to enhance participation in learning, reinforced learner's self-confidence or self-esteem, perceived relevance of adult education and enhanced the learning environment, such as trusting, collaboration, assurance of ample time to master knowledge and skills, creation of positive learning experiences, and provision of non-threatening and useful feedback regarding performance (Scanlan, 1986). The effect of the above variables reflected in the percentage of attendance rate. The present study seemed to extend Boshier's congruence model by examining the patterns of attendance within the framework which he established.

From the conception of the study, the following research question
is proposed:

What are the factors affecting the persistence in class attendance among students of adult education short courses, whether these are individual adult's self-esteem, student expectation, or classroom environment?

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter deals with definitions, hypotheses, instrumentation, results from the pilot study, sampling, and analysis design.

A. Definitions

Key concepts and variables used in the present study were defined as follows:

1. Adult education: Adult education referred to the organized learning involving a student teacher relationship. In the activity, the learner was supervised or directed in learning experiences over a specific period of time for a recognized purpose (National Center of Education Studies, 1980).

2. Adult learner: Adult learner referred to an individual between the age of 16-65 who was at that time not enrolled full time in a school, college or other education institution, and was not a candidate for a diploma or degree.

3. Short course: Short course was defined as those with duration between 3 to 6 months.

4. Attendance rate: Attendance rate referred to the percentage of actual attendance in terms of numbers of sessions. It was calculated by the formula:

$$\frac{\text{number of sessions attended by the adult learner}}{\text{total number of sessions for the course}} \times 100\%$$

5. Dropout: Dropout referred to a student who attended the first class session, but failed to turn up in four subsequent class sessions. In other words, when an adult learner did not attend classes for four consecutive sessions following the first session, he would be considered a drop out. Dropouts were identified through the inspection of the school attendance records.

6. Self-esteem: Self-esteem referred to a global entity on how people felt about themselves in general. In this study, this was measured by Rosenberg's scale (1979) and was used as an indicator of one's impression or opinion of oneself (Rice, 1990).

7. Expectation: Expectation referred to the individual's aims or objectives in learning. In the present study, this was measured by Boshier's participation scale (1973).

8. Classroom Social Environment: Classroom social environment was considered as the "personality" of the environment, as opposed to its physical and human characteristics. It was measured by a scale developed by Lam and Wong (1974), which measured the classroom environment as constructed by the teacher, students, and their interaction.

9. Persistence: In the study, persistence was defined as the student's continuous attendance in the course. In this study, it referred to students' attendance in the first eight sessions in the course.

10. Situational barriers: Situational barriers were defined as the barriers arising from one's situation in life at a given time.

11. Institutional barriers: These barriers referred to practices and procedures that excluded or discouraged working adults from participating in educational activities.

12. Schedule: Schedule referred to the course length, frequency of course sessions and duration of each session.

13. Distance duration: This referred to the time taken by a student to travel to school.

14. Age: Age was categorized into five groups, namely, 20 or below, 21-30, 31-40, 41-50, and 51 or above.

15. Educational level: This was defined in four categories, namely, primary, secondary, post-secondary, and university.

16. Nature of work: Nature of work referred to three types of work, namely, full-time, part-time, and others (including retired, students, housewives and unemployed.)

17. Vocational courses: This referred to courses in Shorthand, Typewriting, Bookkeeping, Import and Export Practice.

B. Hypotheses

The hypotheses are formulated in the null form. They are:

1: There is no significant relationship between the individual's self-esteem, expectation, classroom environment and rate of attendance.

2: There is no significant relationship between the individual's self-esteem, expectation, classroom environment and rate of attendance after controlling for the effects of contextual variables.

Actually, it is expected that positive self-esteem, high expectation, and better classroom environment would correlate with higher attendance rate. Furthermore, it is speculated that the above relations

still hold after controlling for effects due to contextual variables.

C. Instrumentation

Self-esteem

Self-esteem was measured by a standardized instrument developed by Rosenberg (1979) (Appendix A). All the items were in 5-point scales ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The responses from the items were aggregated to give a total score.

Student expectation

Student expectation was measured by an instrument adapted from Boshier's participation scale (1973). The items and response alternatives had been modified and then translated into Chinese to suit the present study (Appendix A). All the items were in 5-point scales responses from the items were aggregated to give a total score.

External environment

The self-other (teacher & fellow students) relationship was measured by the instrument adapted from Lam and Wong (1974). The items and response alternatives had been modified and then translated into Chinese to suit the present study (Appendix A). All the items were in 5-point scales ranging from strongly

agree to strongly disagree. The responses from the items were aggregated to give a total score.

The internal consistency reliability coefficients, the Cronbach's Alpha, for self-esteem, student expectation and classroom environment of the pilot study was found to be satisfactory. In the first pilot study, the reliabilities of the student expectation and classroom environment scales were high whereas that for self-esteem was relatively low (see Table 1). In view of the low reliability of the self-esteem scale, these items were revised and more items were included. A second pilot study showed that the revised self-esteem scale was significantly improved and it was adopted in the final study (see Table 1). The reliabilities of the instruments was tested again in the main study. The results are shown in Table 2.

TABLE 1

Reliability of the self-esteem, student expectation, and classroom environment scales in the pilot studies.

Variables	Number of items	Cronbach's Alpha
	Pilot Study 1	
Self-esteem	7	0.42
Student expectation	12	0.82
Classroom environment	11	0.81
	Pilot Study 2	
Self-esteem	10	0.74
Student expectation	12	0.66
Classroom environment	11	0.80

N (Study 1) = 93, N (Study 2) = 42.

TABLE 2

Reliability of the instruments of self-esteem, student expectation and classroom environment

Variables	Number of items	Cronbach's Alpha
Self-esteem	10	0.79
Student expectation	12	0.74
Classroom environment	11	0.79

Contextual variables

Several contextual variables were taken into consideration. These were sex of student, age, marital status, educational level, nature of work, class schedule, child care of family, transportation, number of class session per week, distance duration.

D. Sampling

For this cross-sectional survey study, data were collected from students of Caritas Adult & Higher Education Centres and the Hong Kong School of Commerce. The Caritas centres were chosen because Caritas Education Service was the largest provider of adult vocational programs. Being deeply committed to its mission of helping adults, Caritas Adult & Higher Education Service was more concerned with the situation than other agencies. Secondly, the researcher was the administrator of one of Caritas Education Centres and was therefore in the position to obtain cooperation.

The Hong Kong School of Commerce was selected for several reasons. First, the school has been established for a long time and was one of the major institutions in offering vocational courses. Second, the school provided another source of students who might be different from those attending courses in Caritas.

Third, the school was located in Tsim Sha Tsui on Kowloon side. This supplemented the other samples so as to have students from a very wide range of geographic locations. With the students from this school, the final sample consisted of students from various parts from Hong Kong, Kowloon, and the New Territories.

A total of 540 questionnaires including global self-esteem, participation scale, external environment scale and the contextual information form were distributed to six Caritas adult education centres and the Hong Kong School of Commerce. Three classes of vocational courses in each school were randomly chosen to complete the questionnaires. Students were assured that their individual responses would never be identified and were only be used as research purpose only. The number of subjects sampled in the study is summarized in Table 3. Totally 540 copies of questionnaires were distributed. Among them, 416 copies were given to students during class session, whereas the remaining 124 copies were sent by mail to the absentees and dropouts. For those collected in class, 370 copies were found to be valid. Whereas, 60 valid copies were obtained from those sent by mail. Thus, a total of 430 valid questionnaires were obtained with an overall return rate of 79.6%. After the questionnaires were collected, students' attendance rates were

calculated based on the class registries as provided by the respective school authority.

TABLE 3.

Number of questionnaires distributed by educational institution

Name of Institutions	No. of learners
Caritas Francis Hsu College	60
Caritas Institute for Further & Adult Education - Chai Wan Night School	80
Caritas Institute for Further & Adult Education - Fanling Night School	70
Caritas Institute for Further & Adult Education - Shatin Night School	70
Caritas Institute for Further & Adult Education - Tsuen Wan Night School	80
Caritas Institute for Further & Adult Education - Yuen Long Night School	80
Hong Kong School of Commerce	100
Total	540

E. Data Analyses

In the study, the unit of analysis was the individual student. For each student, items in the same dimension were aggregated. This means that for each student there would be fourteen scores including one score for self-esteem, one score for student expectation, one score for external environment, one score for rate of attendance and ten scores for the contextual variables.

The following procedures were adopted in data analysis:

1. Contextual information was tabulated to give descriptions of the sample.
2. Descriptive statistics including mean, and standard deviation were calculated to see if adult learners differ in their degrees of self-esteem, student expectation, and external environment, and in the pattern of attendance rate.
3. Pearson correlation was used to estimate the relationship between self-esteem, student expectation and external environment and attendance rate.
4. Multiple regression was used to test how students' attendance rate was related to self-esteem, student expectation, external environment and contextual variables.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

In the chapter, the information on the contextual variables and descriptive statistics of both the independent and dependent variables are first reported. Then, the findings of the main study are presented.

A. Contextual Variables

Table 4 provides the general information about adult learners in the main study. There were 18% male and 82% female. It could be seen that most of the subjects were female. Regarding age, 92% of the sample were under 30 years of age, whereas only 8% of them were 31 and above. This means that most of the subjects were relatively young. On marital status, 89% of adult learners were single, the rest (11%) married. Does this mean that family commitments may be one of the main constraints for adult learners (Wilkinson, 1982)? On educational level, 96% of the adult learners had completed secondary education. Perhaps this is due to the basic requirement in enrolling in adult vocational courses. 74% of the subjects indicate they were working full-time. This means many of the adult learners attended these vocational courses under the strain of a full-time employment. The rest

or 26% of them worked part-time or without job. One wonders whether similar phenomenon exists on other adult education among vocational courses?

TABLE 4.

Demographic & personal information

Variables	Categories	Percentage (%)
Sex	Male	18
	Female	82
Age	below 20	44
	21-30	48
	31 & above	8
Marital status	single	89
	married	11
Education level	secondary	96
	post-secondary	4
Nature of work	full-time	74
	part-time & other	26%

N = 429.

Table 5 gives additional information about the adult learners' attendance at these adult vocational courses. Most of these (71%) used public transport to attend classes whereas the others walked to school.

The majority of them spent almost 30 minutes in travelling to classes. Improvement in public transportation would encourage adult learners to study. Less than half of the students chose to study only one session per week, but the rest (58%), were enrolled for two or more sessions per week. Regarding students' attendance rate, it was found that 59.5% of the students attended over 90% of the lessons. Nearly half (48.6%) of the subjects attended all lessons. The mean attendance was 85.6% of all lessons.

TABLE 5

Information on attendance at Adult Education Courses

Variables	Categories	Percentage (%)
Mode of transportation	on foot	29
	by public transport	71
Class sessions per week	one	42
	two	29
	two or more	29
Time of travel	15 minutes	30
	30 minutes	41
	45 minutes and more	29

N = 429.

In sum, the subjects were predominantly female, single, young, and holding full-time jobs. They were almost all secondary school leavers. They spent more than 30 minutes each time on public transport when travelling to attend classes each week.

B. Relationship Between Student Self-esteem, Student Expectation, Classroom Environment And The Rate Of Class Attendance

As a preliminary step, the characteristics of the students from Caritas and the Hong Kong School of Commerce were compared. It was found that though the students' attendance rate of the latter was significantly higher than that of the former, self-esteem, student expectation, and classroom environment of the students from the two institutions were basically the same (see Table 6). Thus, the two student samples were combined in the following analyses.

The research question proposed in the study is "What are the factors affecting persistence of class attendance among students in adult education short courses?" From table 6, it can be seen that mean score for self-esteem is 3.45. This score in a possible scale range of 1 t0 5 indicated the students' confidence was only moderate. Individuals with high self-esteem, were expected to be successful, whereas those with less self-confidence might entertain doubts about their probable success.

TABLE 6

Means and standard deviations of self-esteem, student expectation, classroom environment, and attendance rate

Variables	Overall Mean	Individual Institute Caritas mean	HKSC mean	t value
Self-esteem	3.45 (.48)	3.43 (.48)	3.52 (.49)	1.57
Student expectation	3.37 (.48)	3.36 (.50)	3.40 (.40)	.67
Classroom environment	3.15 (.47)	3.17 (.49)	3.10 (.38)	1.28
Attendance rate	85.6 (22.8)	83.45 (24.59)	94.11 (9.43)	3.97 **

HKSC = Hong Kong School of Commerce.

N(total) = 430, N(Caritas) = 343, N(Hong Kong School of Commerce) = 87.

** $p < 0.01$.

The mean score of student expectation was 3.37 which was in the middle of the scale range 1 to 5. This indicated that students did not have a very clear and distinct goal and expectation.

The three components for classroom environment were teacher, fellow student and course content. The mean score was 3.15, a score considered in the middle of the scale range.

Correlation among the independent variables

Table 7 shows the Pearson correlation coefficients among the three independent variables, namely, student self-esteem, student expectation, and classroom environment. It could be seen that these correlate to each other significantly at a level of either 0.01 or 0.05. That is, students with higher self-esteem and better perceived classroom environment have high expectations from the course.

TABLE 7

Correlation coefficients among self-esteem, student expectation and classroom environment

	Student expectation	Classroom environment
Self-esteem	0.13 **	0.16 **
Student Expectation		0.12 *

N = 430.

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$.

Correlation between Attendance Rate and Self-esteem, Student Expectation, and Classroom Environment

Table 8 shows the Pearson correlation coefficients between attendance rate and self-esteem, student expectation, and classroom environment. It was found that

attendance rate correlated significantly with student expectation and classroom environment. However, attendance rate did not correlate well with self-esteem.

TABLE 8

Correlation coefficients between attendance rate and self-esteem, student expectation, and classroom environment

	Attendance rate
Self-esteem	0.07
Student Expectation	0.16 **
Classroom Environment	0.26 **

N = 430. ** $p < 0.001$.

It could be seen that student expectation was related to attendance rate. It showed that students with more satisfaction in classroom environment found to have higher attendance rate. Student expectation, classroom environment and attendance were significantly correlated in the range from 0.16 to 0.26. This also means students with high expectations had higher attendance rate. Also, students were satisfied with classroom environment were better in attendance. In sum, higher in expectation and classroom environment, had better attendance.

Relation of self-esteem, student expectation, classroom environment and contextual variables to attendance rate

Multiple regression analysis was used to examine the relationship among self-esteem, student expectation, classroom environment and student attendance. Students' attendance was the dependent variable whereas self-esteem, student expectation and classroom environment were the criterion variables. It was found that the criterion variables totally accounted for 8.46% of the variance (multiple $R = 0.29$), $F(3,426) = 13.13$, $p < 0.01$ (see Table 9).

TABLE 9

Multiple regression of attendance rate by self-esteem, student expectation, and classroom environment

Variables	Beta	Significant level
Self-esteem	0.01	ns
Student expectation	0.13	**
Classroom environment	0.24	**

ns = nonsignificant

** $p < 0.01$.

To examine the contribution due to self-esteem, student expectation, and classroom environment after

controlling for the contextual variables, hierarchical multiple regression was used. In the first analysis, the criterion variables were the contextual variables, whereas in the second step, self-esteem, student expectation and classroom environment were added.

It was found that self-esteem, student expectation, and classroom environment accounted for 6.77% (10.91% - 4.14%) of the total variance of attendance rate (see Table 10). By subtracting 6.77% from 8.46%, it could be concluded that the overlapping of the contextual variables with the self-esteem, student expectation, and classroom environment was only 1.69%.

TABLE 10

Hierarchical multiple regression of attendance rate by contextual variables, self-esteem, student expectation, and classroom environment

Variables	Multiple R	% of variance	*F* values
Step One			
Contextual variables	0.20	4.14	2.01 **
Step Two			
Contextual variables + self-esteem + student expectation + classroom environment	0.33	10.91	4.24 *

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$.

The individual beta values of the contextual variables are shown in Table 11. It could be seen that the individual contextual variables were not significantly related to attendance rate. That is, each of the variables, students' sex, age, marital status, educational level, class schedule, nature of work, child care of family, and time of travel (duration) were not related to attendance rate. As it could be seen from the regression coefficients in Table 11, student expectation and classroom environment were the main predictors.

TABLE 11

Multiple regression (forced entry) of attendance rate by contextual variables, self-esteem, student expectation, and classroom environment

Variables	Beta	Significant level
Duration	0.07	ns
Self-esteem	0.02	ns
Nature of work-part-time	-0.08	ns
-no job	-0.05	ns
Schedule	0.07	ns
Age	-0.05	ns
Sex	-0.07	ns
Educational level	-0.08	ns
Classroom environment	0.22	**
Student expectation	0.11	*
Child care	0.01	ns
Marital status	0.01	ns

ns = nonsignificant

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Summary of findings

In the main study, seven schools and 540 students were involved. The subjects were predominantly female, single, young and holding full-time jobs. They were almost all secondary school leavers. They spent more than 30 minutes with public transport when they travelled to attend class mostly once a week. The findings of the study show that attendance rate correlates significantly with student expectation and classroom environment while attendance rate does not correlate with self-esteem. Contextual variables do not directly relate to the rate of attendance, but they contribute to the variance.

Discussion

From the profile of the subjects, it was found that the average mean scores of student self-esteem was 3.45 which indicated that the students' confidence was only moderate. It is possible that Chinese tend to be humble in their responses, which leads to a moderate self-esteem score. The self-esteem of adult learners was homogeneous whatever the attendance rate is high or low in the study. Adults with poor educational

backgrounds frequently lacked interest in learning or confidence in their ability to learn (Cross, 1981). they will avoid the risk required in learning new things, basically because they do not expect to succeed. In their experience with education in the past, the outcome of effort is more likely to be the pain of failure than the reward of a new job, a promotion, the admiration of others, or the self-satisfaction of succeeding at the learning task. Early and constant failure in school usually leads to lower self-esteem. Furthermore, these people with poor academic achievement and unpleasant experience are less likely to take further courses once they leave school. It is because the possibility of failing in these adult education courses are too threatening to them. Those who had unpleasant experiences in school would think that they were "too dumb" to succeed in academic learning. For them, a push to boost their self-confidence is important. Then they will be more willing to venture out into the less uncertain new learning situations. Thus, one of the things that educators can do is to give more encouragement to those with low self-confidence. Another beneficial way is to create more low risk educational opportunities for these students.

The mean score of student expectation was 3.37 and was the middle of the scale range. The moderate value possibly indicated that the students did not have a very clear and distinct goal and expectation. If a goal that is important to a person is likely to be achieved through further education, then the motivation in adult learning is strong. If the goal is not especially important or the likelihood of success is in doubt, motivation decreases accordingly. The importance of designing learning experience that meet the goals of adult learners seems clear. The problem is to determine what those goals are. In Hong Kong, the major emphasis in adult learning has been on the practical rather than the academic; on the applied rather than the theoretical; and on skills rather than on knowledge or information. It is consistent with the general conclusion of Johnstone and Rivera (1965).

People who do not have good jobs are interested in further education to get better jobs, and those who have good jobs would like to advance in them. Thus, if the courses can fulfill the respective needs of these two large categories of students, participation would be high. Otherwise, drop out rate will be high. It is paramount that adult educators design appropriate learning experiences to help people achieve such goals. Learning should be a rewarding experience from a

child's earliest years. Negative or punishing experiences should be avoided, and the best way to treat "lack of knowledge" is probably to regard it as a temporary state in the natural inclination for lifelong learning. As found in Hong Kong and other countries, drop out rates for adult education are relatively high. It is particularly true for the mature students in the matriculation courses. This is simply a fact of life we must accept. A high proportion of them embark on their courses with a give-it-a-try attitude and without any expectations. If circumstances militate against their studies they abandon them, not gladly but quite naturally, with much the same kind of regret as someone might abandon a planned picnic if the weather turns nasty.

It was also found in the study that the mean score of classroom environment was 3.15. The value lied in the middle of the scale range and possibly indicated that the students did not have strong opinion (not very satisfied nor very dissatisfied) on the classroom environment. Boshier's theory suggested that the proper matching of adults to educational environments was important. Motivation for learning was a function of the interaction between internal psychological factors and external environmental variables, or at least the participant's perception and interpretation of environmental factors (Boshier, 1973).

If one's total current environment requires or encourages further learning, one will perceive adult education as having, at least potentially, high personal value or utility. An individual's perception of the value of adult education quite obviously will affect that individual's disposition or readiness to partici pate. If students can achieve their expectations, they will persist in attending the courses.

Classroom environment is defined as the "personality" of the environment, as opposed to its physical and human aggregate characteristics. The environment is socially constructed by the teacher, students, course level and their interaction, thus leading to distinctive attitudinal and behavioral norms. Students who found the level of their course was not as they had anticipated, would stop attending classes. Some student complained that they were not satisfied with tutor. The classroom environment seemed to be the more important predictor.

With respect to environmentally determined factors, many of the key components of existing models of participation included factors such as participation opportunities (Cross, 1981), individual experience of need (Rubenson, 1977), and learning press (Darkenwald and Merriam, 1982). When the contextual variables were

considered, it was found that none of the contextual variables had significant predicting power. Student expectation and classroom environment were the main predictors. Three categories of motives has been raised, which are namely, 'vocational', 'instrumental', and 'goal' motives (Houle, 1961).

In this study, as the students were taking vocational courses, it is likely that the vocational motive drive might dominate. That is, students attended the courses mainly because they thought that the course materials were useful in the present or future careers. In other words, students were either preparing for a possible new career or trying to do better in their present job (Courtney, 1981). As mentioned in the previous section, 92% of the sample students were under 30 of age and 89% of them were single. The wish of young people, at the start of their career or perhaps unemployed, is to increase their potential on the labour market. However, the external and domestic pressures would more easily lead to abandoning the course (Hibbett, 1986). Even if students had the goal to attend the course, they were unable to continue their studies because of some unanticipated event which occurred after their enrollment.

There may be some other factors that would influence attendance rate such as family commitments, change of jobs, change in working hours and health factors (Wilkinson, 1982). As far as one dare generalize, it is probably better for mature students to avoid a double study commitment unless one course will be completed before the other gets into its 'final examination run'. Certainly the vast majority of respondents indicated that they had abandoned the course because of conflicts of interests of one kind or another. As student apparently did not find the work too difficult and had no other problems, this seems strange, but exam-phobia did seem fairly common in mature students (Smith, 1987). It is not primarily an end-purpose-oriented course and, for such people, ceasing to attend when the occurrent enjoyment is outweighed by the inconvenience is perfectly natural. It seems fair to suspect, however, that if there had been patently high levels of study achievement by these people, their 'enjoyment' of the course would have been greater. Furthermore, students have greater motive to attend courses when their need is higher. It would be quite impertinent that these mature students put high priority to these courses.

The rival tradition in education, found notably in economically more successful countries, was of building an industrial society on earlier and more lavish educational investment. A country's most important resource was always its people and the better educated they were, the more the country prospered. Vocational education of adults would rapidly grow in importance because of the dating of skills, the demand for new skills in industries which did not exist before, and because the embarrassment of growing unemployment. The new age of educational instrumentalism saw growing importance in basic, compensatory and related areas of adult education likely to provide the style of workforce and society on which the new technological society could be built (Stephens, 1981).

Limitations

The present research has the following limitations:

This study is based on a cross-sectional observation design. Only correlational relationship is measured for the independent variables and dependent variables, therefore, causal relationship cannot be attributed.

In this study, students' perceptions of their learning environment are asked. It is possible that there is a gap between their perceptions and the reality. Student's attendance rate may be explained by self-concept, expectation and external environment, life transitions - trigger events may affect student's continuing participation in learning (Cross, 1981).

The sampling in this study is mostly from Caritas Adult & Higher Education Service Centres. It is the characteristics of student behaviour in this group, therefore it may not be applicable to other adult educational agencies.

The present study only focuses on the vocational courses. Courses of an academic and general nature may operate in different situations.

There may be other personal and environmental factors, e.g., professional training of the teachers, interference from daily work, conflict between job and family etc., which may be relevant to this study. Thus, the application of the findings of this study should not be overgeneralized.

Within each sample school, the coordinator of each school randomly distributed the questionnaires. This could not be controlled and the time and situation for completing the questionnaires could not be fixed. Therefore, the accuracy and reliability of the students' responses may be affected.

Conclusions

The important function of adult education courses is to provide a means of self-discovery -- and a similar study of successful students might well unearth a high proportion who had surprised themselves by their determination and resourcefulness in overcoming obstacles. In any case, since adult educator cannot arrange people's lives for them, it is a problem over which the educator has little control. The most adult educator can hope for is to make the course itself so stimulating and provide such reassurance and support that, at times of indecision, the scales will tip in favour of continuing. Adult education contribute to the widening of general resource and life satisfaction to all people. Thus, this will narrow the gap between the least and the most educated sectors of the population if the educationally disadvantaged ones have the chance to be educated. Further studies about adult education are needed and required. The documentation of the profiles in the study would provide a reference for the Hong Kong Government, voluntary agencies and adult educator to improve the attendance rate when providing the courses for adult learners. The benefits of adult education are significant, both for individuals and society. It is an important area that should not be overlooked.

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APPENDIX A: Instruments used in the main study

各位同學：

我在香港中文大學教育學院修讀碩士課程，擬採用「影響成人教育短期課程出席率之因素」作為我論文題目。懇請閣下抽出五至十分鐘時間，填寫此問卷，多謝合作。

趙 慈
一九九二年六月三十日

第一部份

這部份引出一些有關影響你參加成人學習課程目的，請盡量客觀地作答。

請圈出最適合你的答案（只選一個 1,2,3,4 或 5）

	極不真確	不真確	無意見	真確	極真確
1. 補充以往不足的教育。	1	2	3	4	5
2. 保障專業晉升機會。	1	2	3	4	5
3. 為家庭之轉變作好準備。	1	2	3	4	5
4. 克服日常生活的挫抑。	1	2	3	4	5
5. 找尋人生有意義的事物。	1	2	3	4	5
6. 補償早年失去的教育機會。	1	2	3	4	5
7. 與家人知識看齊。	1	2	3	4	5
8. 為現職爭取更佳的身份地位。	1	2	3	4	5
9. 滿足求知慾。	1	2	3	4	5
10. 結交新朋友。	1	2	3	4	5
11. 求較佳工作職位。	1	2	3	4	5
12. 加強本身工作能力。	1	2	3	4	5

第二部份

這部份列出一些對課程，同學和老師間關係，請盡量客觀地回答。

請圈出最適合你的答案（只選一個 1,2,3,4 或 5）

	極不同之意	不同意	無意見	同意	極同之意
1. 你認為導師所備的課程十分適合。	1	2	3	4	5
2. 課程的內容，如你的理想。	1	2	3	4	5
3. 你的程度能趕上課程。	1	2	3	4	5
4. 你認為導師的教學方法效能十分好。	1	2	3	4	5
5. 導師所用作為教學媒介的語言會妨礙你的學習。	1	2	3	4	5
6. 你有機會解決你學習的難題，你有機會參加小組討論。	1	2	3	4	5
7. 你認為同學十分友善。	1	2	3	4	5
8. 你能接近你的導師。	1	2	3	4	5
9. 你與導師閒談的次數很多。	1	2	3	4	5
10. 你對導師十分滿意。	1	2	3	4	5
11. 你對課程十分滿意。	1	2	3	4	5

第三部份

這部份希望知道你個人對「自我」的看法。

請圈出最適合你的答案（只選一個 1,2,3,4 或 5）

	強烈反對	反對	不也贊不成反，對	贊成	強烈贊成
1. 我做事的能力和大部份人一樣好。	1	2	3	4	5
2. 我希望我能夠更看重我自己。	1	2	3	4	5
3. 我覺得我有很多好的特質。	1	2	3	4	5
4. 我對於自己是抱著肯定的態度。	1	2	3	4	5
5. 我認為自己是個有價值的人，至少基本上是與別人相等的。	1	2	3	4	5
6. 總括而言，我很滿意自己。	1	2	3	4	5
7. 我覺得我沒有甚麼值得驕傲。	1	2	3	4	5
8. 很多時，我認為自己是一無是處。	1	2	3	4	5
9. 我很多時覺得自己很無用。	1	2	3	4	5
10. 總括來說，我覺得我是一個失敗者。	1	2	3	4	5

第四部份

為了方便資料的統計和分析，請填上一些你的個人資料。請在合適的方格內“ ✓”。

1．性　　別 : □ 男　□ 女

2．年　　齡 : □ 20或以下　□ 21-30　□ 31-40
□ 41-50　□ 51或以上

3．婚姻狀況 : □ 未婚　□ 已婚

4．學　　歷 : □ 小學　□ 中學　□ 大專　□ 大學

5．職　　業 : □ 全職
□ 兼職
□ 其他（學生，家庭主婦，退休，失業等。）

6．上課時間 : □ 6:30 p.m.－9:30 p.m.
□ 6:30 p.m.－8:00 p.m.
□ 8:00 p.m.－9:30 p.m.
□ 其他

7．家庭狀況（只需提供六歲以下子女數目的資料） : □ 不適用　□ 0個　□ 一個
□ 二　個　□ 三個或以上

8．用何種方式（或交通工具）回校 : □ 步行
□ 地鐵／火車
□ 巴士／電車／小巴
□ 私家車
□ 兩種或以上交通工具

9．每週上課次數 : □ 一次（三小時）
□ 兩次（每次一小時半）
□ 其他

10．需要花費多少時間回校上課 : □ 十五分鐘以內　□ 三十分鐘以內
□ 四十五分鐘以內　□ 一小時以內
□ 多於一小時

11．已上課堂數（包括今堂） : _____ 堂

12．缺課堂數 : _____ 堂